

Strategic Decoration in the Persianate and Latinate Worlds c. 1500-1700

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On Monday, 16 April, historian [Gijs Kruijtzer](#) (2011-2012 [Rechtskulturen](#) Fellow at Humboldt University Law School) will talk in [Recht im Kontext](#)'s Rechtskulturen Colloquium about [Strategic Decoration in the Persianate and Latinate Worlds c. 1500-1700](#)

Ever since Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets, there has been a sense in all three of the Abrahamic religions that man-made likenesses of animated beings may in some way compete with or obstruct reverence for the one God. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries people in both Latin-using Western Europe and Persian-using Iran, India and Central Asia struggled with questions about what the law on images was, how it should be applied and how one could get around it. In both areas, artists and their patrons were continually exploring the boundaries of the law. The Persianate World in this epoch saw its golden age of painting on paper, while Latinate Europe experienced a backlash against images with the coming of the Reformation, but also saw a golden age of painting on canvas.

Apparently, as contemporaries remarked, images fulfilled a human need that was hard to suppress. Some paintings of the era reflect on this issue in internal dialogues about emptiness and idols and about the tension between law and faith, central to both the Reformation in Europe and Sufism in the Persianate World. At the same time, the rationalism or humanism that was typical of the era led elite patrons of the arts to favour individual expression. If we choose to see all these approaches to the law as strategies, what would a comparison across the two regions yield?

[Christoph Möllers](#) will comment on Gijs Kruijtzer's paper; [Lucy Chebout](#) will serve as moderator.

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